

Delicious taro dishes educate as well as satisfy - Hawaii News - Honolulu Star-Advertiser

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By Joleen Oshiro

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The artistry of Eric Enos' food is not that it's got fancy ingredients or requires fussy preparation. Yet Enos pre-sents his dishes alongside classically trained chefs who deliver gourmet dishes to the most discriminating palates. And it's safe to say that bite for bite, Enos' food packs the biggest punch.

2015 CALABASH & COOKS CULINARY FUNDRAISER

Benefits Malama Learning Center

» **Where:** Kapolei High School Plaza, 91-5007 Kapolei Parkway

» **When:** 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. April 18 (opens 5 p.m. for VIPs)

» **Tickets:** \$35 pre-sale, \$25 students, \$20 children 5 to 12, \$75 VIP (prices higher at the door); purchase at malamalearningcenter.org

» **Info:** 351-9465 or email paula@malamalearningcenter.org

Why? Because Enos' primary ingredient, taro, is not only versatile and delicious, it's the key to providing education about culture, nutrition and sustainability to the folks who not just eat it, but who learn to grow it and cook it as well. And these folks include everyone from young children to their parents and beyond.

For years, Enos has been bringing taro to Malama Learning Center's annual Calabash & Cooks Culinary Fundraiser. There, attendees can try their hand at poi pounding or cooking taro into delicious dishes. This year is no exception: Enos will help visitors make their own taro hummus and taro flatbread.

The recipe for flatbread could not be simpler, he says. It's a combo of taro and any type of flour, plus water.

The event will be held April 18 at Kapo-lei High School. The campus houses the learning center, a private, nonprofit organization that brings together art, science, conservation and culture to promote sustainable living in Hawaii.

Chefs from venues such as Ka'aha-'aina Cafe, Miso & Ale and Nani Kore, as well as students from Kapo-lei's culinary program, are headed up by chef Mark "Gooch" Nogu-chi of Pili Group and Merriman's Kapa-lua executive chef Zach Sato to pre-sent delicious fare.

For the event, Enos is basically extending the work he already does at Ka'ala Farm in Wai-anae, which he co-founded more than 30 years ago. Ka'ala teaches traditional practices to youth and families.

"Schools come up, and we've restored a traditional loi (taro patch). We brought down water, so we're

dealing with watershed issues," said Enos, who also serves as executive director.

But in teaching cultural practices of the past, Enos has a forward-thinking agenda. For the past four years, Ka'ala has been funded by a federal grant to address childhood obesity. Under the USDA Children's Healthy Living Program, Ka'ala provides intervention for a community with a high concentration of Native Hawaiians in poor health.

"We were already growing traditional food. Now we're getting people aligned with healthy behaviors," he said.

That includes family garden projects — Ka'ala put in dryland taro, breadfruit and other items to create an edible forest — and nutrition.

They harvest and cook the taro in bulk, then prepare the traditional food in a variety of contemporary ways. Think the flatbread and hummus, a tortilla wrap, even dim sum wrappers and noodles.

"We convert it into what an urbanized population is accustomed to eating. For poor families there are only fast-food places," he said. "The art in cooking is knowing how to make something plain into something delicious."

Enos says the path to success is filled with small steps. "It's a work in prog-ress."

Efforts must be translatable to people's lives, he says. Dryland taro is a variety that families can grow in their own backyards, and schools can add it to their gardens. Enos deems it as easy to grow as a tomato. "With some water, mulch and time, it'll grown fine."

As for nutrition, "the good thing about taro is you can eat the whole plant," Enos said. "Treat it like a potato. Throw it in the pan with less healthy items like Spam. The way I see it, it's better than Spam alone. The taro kicks it up one notch."

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